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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 09/24/08

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Articles:

1) Bush wants to see Aso early

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
September 24, 2008

NEW YORK-U.S. President Bush met with former Prime Minister Mori, now visiting the United States, at a New York City hotel on the evening of Sept. 22 (yesterday morning Japan time). In the meeting, Bush told Mori that he welcomes Liberal Democratic Party President Aso as Japan's new prime minister.

Mori explained that Aso will be elected prime minister in an extraordinary session of the Diet today. "I called Mr. Aso a little while ago, and he asked me to send his best regards to President and Mrs. Bush," Mori told Bush. He added, "Mr. Aso shares your view of the international situation." In response, Bush also asked Mori to send his best regards to Aso. "Prime Minister Aso is wonderful," Bush said, "and I want to see him as soon as possible."

2) Aso may become shortest-serving prime minister if LDP falls into opposition

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)
September 24, 2008

Newly elected Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Taro Aso will

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be named prime minister today. Aso may dissolve the House of Representatives in early October at the earliest. It is unprecedented for a prime minister to resort to this last gasp measure as his first task after taking office. The possibility is strong that Aso will dissolve the Lower House in the record shortest period of any prime minister.

Under the present Constitution, Ichiro Hatoyama was the prime minister who dissolved the Lower House in the shortest period after taking office in 1955. He dissolved the Lower House only 46 days after he was named prime minister, aiming at departing from the minority ruling party.

Yoshiro Mori, who suddenly assumed office in April 2000 following the death of then Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, was the prime minister who dissolved the Lower House in the second-shortest period on June 2, 2000, setting the election date for June 25, Obuchi's birthday.

The dominant view in the LDP is that the Lower House should be dissolved while the Aso cabinet is enjoying popularity.

Should Aso dissolve the Lower House in early October immediately after questioning sessions by party representatives at the forthcoming extraordinary Diets session, Aso would dissolve the lower chamber about ten days after he was named prime minister.

However, it is a dangerous game because he will have to step down if the ruling coalition fails to secure a majority of the Lower House seats in a general election.

Under the present Constitution, the Hata cabinet ran for only 64 days, the shortest period. If the LDP falls into the opposition in a general on Oct. 26, or on Nov. 2 or 9, Aso will become the shortest-serving prime minister.

3) Extra Diet session opens today; DPJ ready to attack government, ruling coalition on three issues, including tainted rice

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
September 24, 2008

With the extraordinary Diet session to be convened today, the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is waiting expectantly to

debate the supplementary budget bill for this fiscal year that includes a package of emergency economic stimulus measures. Although the DPJ has suggested, as a condition for its cooperation in enacting the budget, dissolution of the House of Representatives through mutual talks, the party wants to give itself a boost as it goes into a general election by pursuing the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by its new president, Taro Aso, on three issues: the tainted rice scandal, pension-record mess, and financial crisis.

DPJ Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka stressed in a speech last evening in Saitama City his party's stance of cooperating with the ruling camp to pass the supplementary budget bill: "For the sake of the public, we will approve the supplementary budget even if we are not fully satisfied with it."

The ruling coalition plans to prioritize deliberations on the supplementary budget over Lower House dissolution. Aso has sought to

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constrain the opposition, saying: "It is unthinkable from a common-sense standpoint to prevent the supplementary budget from clearing the Diet." DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama has taken a flexible stance by indicating the possibility of his party responding to talks to revise the budget bill.

Noting that the budget bill includes funds for supporting small to medium-sized companies, DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa made this critical comment: "Even if funds are increased, there is no system to lend that money to small companies." It thus seems difficult for the DPJ to find common ground in revision talks with the ruling camp.

Should the Lower House be dissolved without reaching an agreement in the revision talks, the ruling coalition would then accuse the DPJ of having "killed" the supplementary budget.

The DPJ has been cooperative on enacting the budget bill because it wants to give the public the impression that the ruling camp instead is being uncooperative.

The largest opposition party has many issues to attack the government and ruling camp on, such as the resale of tainted rice, the falsification of average index monthly earnings that are the base for employee pension payments, and the financial crisis that started in the United States. DPJ head Ozawa will open the party's attack at representative interpellations in the Lower House -- the first time he has led that charge since January last year.

Ozawa expressed his confidence to a senior party member in driving the Aso administration into a corner, saying: "It's a piece of cake. Soon or later (the Aso government) will collapse."

4) Aso cabinet to be launched today; Former Education Minister Hirofumi Nakasone likely to become foreign minister

MAINICHI (Top play) (Abridged)
September 24, 2008

LDP President Aso Taro, 68, is expected to be named the 92nd prime minister, or the 59th person to assume the post, in the extraordinary Diet session that will be convened today. Aso is expected to form a new cabinet later in the day. A meeting was held between Aso and New Komeito Representative Akihiro Ota in Tokyo yesterday in which the two leaders agree to maintain the LDP-New Komeito coalition and concluded a 19-item coalition government accord, including a review of the medical insurance system for people 75 and older. As for the new cabinet, coordination is underway to appoint former Education Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, 62, as foreign minister and former Policy Research Council Chairman Shoichi Nakagawa, 55, as finance minister. It has already been decided to appoint former Education, Science and Technology Minister Takeo Kawamura as chief cabinet secretary.

Aso has also informally decided to reappointment five ministers: Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Toshihiro Nikai, 69; Consumer

Administration Minister Seiko Noda, 48; Economy and Fiscal Policy Minister Kaoru Yosano, 70; Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Yoichi Masuzoe, 59; and Environment Minister Tetsuo Saito, 56. Former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who ran in the LDP presidential race along with Yosano, is likely to become the next agriculture, forestry and fisheries minister. There is a high likelihood that

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former Justice Minister Kunio Hatoyama, 60, will receive the justice portfolio and that former METI Minister Akira Amari, 59, will become the next internal affairs and communications minister. Former deputy defense chief Yasukazu Hamada, 52, is being mentioned as the new defense minister.

In determining the top four LDP executives on Sept. 22, Aso tried to strike a balance among factions, as seen in his appointment of Hiroyuki Hosoda of the Machimura faction, the largest in the party, as secretary general. In forming his cabinet, Aso plans to generate a clear "Aso imprint" irrespective of a factional balance for the sake of the next Lower House election.

The administrative agreement reached between Aso and Ota specifies the steady implementation of a comprehensive economic stimulus package including a flat-sum tax cut, the fundamental reform of the food production and distribution system and amendments to legislation for ensuring food safety, in addition to a review of the medical insurance system for people 75 and older.

The two houses of the Diet are scheduled to hold plenary sessions in succession starting at one o'clock this afternoon to name the next prime minister. The LDP and New Komeito are expected to name Aso as the prime minister in the Lower House session. In the Upper House session, DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa is expected to be named the prime minister as a result of a runoff between the top two contestants following the first ballot in which no one will win a majority of votes. Even though the joint committee of both houses is likely to hold a meeting as a result, Aso is certain to become the next prime minister because the Lower House's choice prevails under the Constitution.

5) Aso to be picked prime minister today: To review public health insurance scheme for elderly people aged 75 or older; Agreement reached on LDP-New Komeito coalition; Review organ to discuss regional bloc system to be set up

NIKKEI (Top Play) (Full)
September 24, 2008

After being designated prime minister in the extraordinary Diet session to be convened today, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Taro Aso will launch his cabinet. During a meeting with New Komeito President Akihiro Ota on the evening of the 23rd, he confirmed the party's stance of continuing its coalition government with that party. Both leaders agreed to take a second look at the public health insurance scheme for elderly people aged 75 or older. In forming his cabinet, Aso will appoint former Research Council Chairman Shoichi Nakagawa as finance minister and former Education Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, an Upper House member, as foreign minister. State Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Kaoru Yosano will remain in his post.

Regarding the health insurance system for people aged 75 or older, the agreement with the New Komeito on the forming of a coalition government mentions that giving consideration to the feelings of elderly people, the new government will make changes to the system to make it better by speeding up the current timetable for revising the system in five years' time, as stipulated by law. The points of contention up for revision will likely be the current system of uniformly drawing a demarcation line for elderly people aged 75 or older, regardless of their health condition, and the automatic

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deduction of premiums.

Aso and Ota also agreed that the system under the current public pension scheme that reduces payouts to pensioners who are still employed should be revised. The agreement also includes measures to address those who do not receive pensions and those whose pension benefits are very low, by shortening the pension system contribution period required to become eligible for pension benefits and extending the additional contribution period required to become eligible for benefits. The aim of the two parties is to demonstrate a stance of tackling reform of the social security system just prior to the upcoming Lower House election.

Concerning the doshu regional bloc system, Aso and Ota confirmed a policy of setting up a review organ within the cabinet to pave the way for enacting a basic law. As to the tainted-rice problem, they took a stance that the issue must be addressed immediately and properly in order to strengthen the system for ensuring food safety.

Referring to three postal services, they said that improvements must be made in order to boost consumer convenience. They drew a line from the stance of those wishing to review the privatization of postal services.

President Aso is expected to be designated the 92nd prime minister once the Diet votes at plenary sessions of the both chambers. He will be the 59th person to be elected as prime minister. Aso immediately will start forming his cabinet. The lineup of the new cabinet is set to be fixed by the evening. He informally selected Takeo Kawamura as chief cabinet secretary, a key post in the cabinet. Akira Amari is expected to be picked as internal affairs minister responsible for revitalizing local districts. Kunio Hatoyama will return as justice minister. Shigeo Ishiba will head the Agriculture Ministry.

First-time ministers are Eisuke Mori as education minister and Yasukazu Hamada as defense minister. Attaching importance to the impact of the U.S.-induced turmoil in the financial markets, coordination is under way with the possibility of having finance minister Nakagawa, who can take part in meetings of finance ministers and central bank governors from the Group of Seven nations (G-7), double as state minister for financial policy.

Concerning the timetable for the next Lower House election, the ruling parties are now undergoing final coordination with focus on two possibilities: (1) official announcement on October 21 and voting on November 2; and (2) official announcement on October 28 and voting on November 9. They will speed up efforts to pave the way for a confrontation with the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) with reigns of government on the line.

List of persons whose entry into cabinet has been firmed up

Internal affairs minister
Akira Amari (59)

Justice minister
Kunio Hatoyama (60)

Foreign minister
Hirofumi Nakasone (62)

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Finance minister
Shoichi Nakagawa (55)

Education minister
Eisuke Mori (60)

Welfare minister
Yoichi Masuzoe (59)

Agriculture minister
Shigeru Ishiba (51)

Economy, trade and industry minister

Toshihiro Nikai (69)

Land and transport minister
Sadakazu Tanigaki (63)

Environment minister
Tetsuo Saito (56)

Defense minister
Yasukazu Hamada (52)

Chief cabinet secretary
Takeo Kawamura (65)

State minister for economic and fiscal policy
Kaoru Yosano (70)

State minister for consumer administration
Seiko Noda (48)

indicates "second term in the same post"

6) Aso puts close ties ahead of flashiness in appointing party executives and cabinet ministers

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
September 24, 2008

New LDP President Taro Aso has decided to give major cabinet and party executive posts to lawmakers who are close to him. Clearly intending to contain destabilizing factors in the party, Aso even tried to persuade former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori to take the post of secretary general. The plan fell through, however. In order to face off with DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa in the next Lower House election, Aso clearly wants to achieve monolithic unity in his administration.

Aso especially struggled in determining how to treat the Machimura faction. Aso, who heads his own faction, believes that his administration could not stand without the backing of the Machimura faction, the largest in the party. Deeming Mori was the only person who could control the Machimura faction, Aso approached the former prime minister via a Machimura faction executive to convince him to take on the post of secretary general.

Mori rejected the offer, and Aso then turned to Hiroyuki Hosoda. Aso highly values Hosoda's unassuming and dependable style to get the job done. Although some urged Aso to make Hosoda the new Diet

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Affairs Committee chairman, the new LDP president insisted on giving the secretary general post to the Machimura faction.

It had been widely believed in the Machimura faction that Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura - the head of the faction that for the most part supported Aso instead of Yuriko Koike in the LDP presidential race -- would become the next secretary general. But a person close to Aso said: "Mr. Aso does not get along well with Mr. Machimura."

Aso reportedly told a veteran lawmaker close to him: "I followed Mr. Mori's advice regarding the post of secretary general, and I will handle the cabinet posts as I like."

Except for the post of secretary general, Aso hardly tampered with the party executives for the sake of the looming Lower House election.

As for the chief cabinet secretary post, Aso first sounded out Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima. Although there a variety of speculations about the Oshima plan that did not materialize, Oshima told those around him: "I did not turn down the offer. There is no one but me who can handle Diet affairs at a time like this."

Aso's trend to give posts to close friends is even clearer when the list of cabinet ministers is considered: such persons as Takeo

Kawamura has informally been picked as chief cabinet secretary, Shoichi Nakagawa will be finance minister, and Akira Amari will become internal affairs and communications minister. All are known for their close ties with Aso. The cabinet lineup also includes some education policy specialists, such as Kawamura and Hiroyumi Nakasone, who is likely to become the next foreign minister.

Contrary to Aso's words to give consideration to the next election, the lineup is a far cry from an all-star cabinet. "Mr. Aso should be only one who will stand out," an Aso aide explained. But there is discontent in the party, with one saying: "Mr. Aso picked only those who have close ties with him. He does not seem really eager to fight the next election."

LDP executives

Secretary general
Hiroyuki Hosoda (Machimura faction)

General Council chairman
Takashi Sasagawa (Tsushima faction)

Policy Research Council chairman
Kosuke Hori (Tsushima faction)

Election Strategy Council chairman
Makoto Koga (Koga faction)

Senior deputy secretaries general
Nobuteru Ishihara (Yamasaki faction)
Motoo Hayashi (Yamasaki faction)

Policy Research Council deputy chairman
Hiroyuki Sonoda (Koga faction)

Election Strategy Council deputy chairman

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Yoshihide Suga (Koga faction)

denotes reappointment.

7) Monthly report by reporters: Prime Minister Fukuda resigns today; no change in his condescending attitude

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
September 24, 2008

By Kei Sato

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda today hands over power just one year after taking office to Taro Aso. He yesterday moved out from the prime minister's official residence and returned to his private residence. This column, started in late April, will end with this issue.

Fukuda suddenly announced his resignation on the night of Sept. 1. When he was told by a reporter at an emergency press conference that he spoke as if describing someone else's problem, Fukuda responded in a strong tone: "I can see myself objectively. I am different from you."

I wonder whether Fukuda really could see himself objectively. He refused the regular press meeting which used to be held twice a day. The reason for his refusal was that "unnecessary background noise should not be created."

However, when he encountered criticism by some members of his government, he reluctantly resumed the press meetings on Sept. 8. Even the failure of the U.S. major securities firm Lehman Brothers hit during a "political vacuum," for he irregularly met the press. So, it is difficult to say that he has fulfilled his accountability.

When Agriculture Minister Seiichi Ota and Administrative Vice Minister Toshiro Shirasu resigned to take responsibilities for the

tainted-rice scandal, Fukuda reacted as if it had nothing do to with him.

Fukuda carried out his duties to the last moment. This may be different from former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who spent last days of his administration in bed. But Fukuda lacked the ability to talk to the public.

I was a reporter attached to the Prime Minister's Official Residence when Fukuda announced his resignation. Although his catch phrase was "to match the public's thinking," I felt everyday his condescending attitude.

8) New Komeito convention approves Ota's reelection

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Full)
September 24, 2008

The New Komeito held a party convention at a Tokyo hotel yesterday and formally approved the reelection of Akihiro Ota, 62, as party head. Ota had been reelected by the party on Sept. 16. The convention also decided to reappoint the party leadership, including Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa, 55. The party also determined the first group of candidates for the next Lower House election: 8 for

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single seats and 27 for the proportional representation segment. Ota said, "The LDP and New Komeito now have a matured relationship allowing them to say what they want to say to each other." Ota also indicated that his party would aim for over 31 seats, its current strength, in the next Lower House election.

9) U.S. envoy urged Japan in July to reconsider putting off SDF Afghan dispatch

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 3) (Full)
September 24, 2008

It was learned yesterday that a special envoy from U.S. President Bush visited Japan in late July to ask the government to reconsider its once-dropped plan to send the Self-Defense Forces to Afghanistan as another approach to assist with that country's reconstruction. "Among the major countries excluding Russia, only Japan has yet to send troops to Afghanistan," the envoy noted. With this, the envoy indicated that Japan's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean alone are insufficient.

The U.S. envoy's visit to Japan was revealed by a source connected to Japan-U.S. relations. On July 6, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda met with Bush in the Hokkaido town of Toyako. On that occasion, Fukuda told Bush that Japan had given up on the option of sending SDF troops to Afghanistan. After that, the envoy was sent to Japan, evidence that the U.S. government was highly dissatisfied. Meanwhile, Liberal Democratic Party President Aso will make his debut as Japan's new prime minister, launching his cabinet today. Washington will likely call on the new prime minister to consider sending SDF troops to Afghanistan.

According to the source, the presidential envoy was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Central Asia Bobby Wilkes. He met with senior officials from the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry and expressed dissatisfaction over the Japanese government's decision to drop its SDF Afghan dispatch. He then asked the Japanese government to consider a new role for the SDF to assist Afghanistan.

10) Aso to pledge contribution to war on terror in U.N. address

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
September 24, 2008

Liberal Democratic Party President Aso, who takes office as prime minister today, has decided to address the United Nations General Assembly in New York. In his U.N. speech, Aso will explain Japan's course of action regarding antiterror measures, global warming, and U.N. reforms. He is also expected to touch on North Korea's

abduction of Japanese nationals. Japan's prime minister will address the UNGA for the first time since Prime Minister Koizumi did in 2005.

Aso's U.N. speech is to take place on the afternoon of Sept. 25 local time (on the morning of Sept. 26 Japan time). It will be the first diplomatic event for Aso as Japan's new prime minister.

Aso met with Administrative Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka and others at LDP headquarters yesterday afternoon to discuss what to put in his U.N. speech.

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In connection with antiterror measures, Aso will clarify that Japan will continue its contribution to the war on terror. When it comes to the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the India Ocean, Aso will avoid declaring its continuation because a government-planned bill to amend the new Antiterrorism Special Measures Law cannot be expected to clear the Diet.

On the issue of global warming, Aso will propose expediting discussions for the Conference of Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held late next year, based on the results of this summer's Group of Eight (G-8) summit in the Hokkaido town of Toyako.

Meanwhile, Aso, given a substantial increase in the number of U.N. members, will suggest the need to reform the U.N. Security Council. In addition, he will also call on U.N. members to support Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC.

11) UN African Union meeting: Japan stresses its achievements

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)
September 24, 2008

The UN on September 22 held a high-level meeting to confer on African development. Responding to Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's call, representatives of about 140 countries, mainly leaders of African nations, took part in the meeting. Former Prime Minister Mori attended the meeting from Japan. He reported on the results of the 4th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD4), which Japan hosted.

At the outset of the meeting, Ban cited the adverse effects of global warming and the food crisis on the development of African nations. He stressed, "If the situation is left unattended, no country will be able to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)." He sought the implementation of the G-8's commitment made at the Gleneagles Summit in Britain to double their government's ODA to Africa by 2010.

Former Prime Minister Mori underscored, "Japan released a set of aid measures at TICAD4 designed to double ODA to Africa and investment by the private sector." Citing the dispatch of a government/private sector delegation for the promotion of trade with and investment to Africa this month, Mori stressed Japan's efforts to extend aid that meets the real needs of Africa.

In response, Tanzanian President Kikwete, chair of the African Union, expressed gratitude for aid from the G-8. However, he complained that the pace of the increase in ODA is slow. He called for cooperation, saying, "It will be too late unless they deliver on their promise now." The meeting closed, adopting a political statement noting the need to strengthen aid to Africa.

SCHIEFFER